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## Observer: Dolly on the Escalator

By RUSSELL BAKER

WASHINGTON, Sept. 8—Moscow's abrupt decision to keep "Hello, Dolly!" off the boards in Russia is bad news. The official interpretation—that the show was banned in retaliation against United States war policy in Vietnam—is not taken seriously by people who understand relations between modern superstates.

These people find it laughable to suggest that Moscow thinks it can give American bombers tit-for-tat by cutting off David Merrick's rubles. (Merrick is the show's producer.) The "Hello, Dolly!" crisis, they agree, is retaliation all right, but not against anything that is happening in Asia.

In the words of one war-room thinker, "what we are faced with is the danger of total cultural warfare." In striking against Broadway's most successful musical, Moscow is overreacting in an escalation out of all proportion to the original American thrust.

### How the Crisis Regan

The crisis was begun quietly enough last month when Soviet photographic planes flying over Cuba recorded the absence of

Bobby Fischer from the Capablanca chess tournament. Scanning newspaper cuttings in the Ministry of Cultural Warfare, several commissars reported simultaneously that Fischer, the American chess champion, had been denied American passport permission to attend the tournament.

Here, it seemed, was a quiet, concealed move by the United States to strike a sneak blow against Communist culture. This suspicion may have been heightened by the negligible coverage given to the United States's Fischer gambit in the American press.

### Obscure Motives

The State Department's motives are obscure. The Fischer affair may have been merely a case of bureaucratic bumbling, or it may have been a small probe by the C.I.A. to test Communist cultural defenses.

Whatever the case, no one anticipated a violent Communist response. Compared to "Hello, Dolly!", Fischer is scarcely more than a popgun in the American cultural arsenal. At most, the Soviets were expected to hit back by throwing a couple of touring American engineers out of Dnieperpetrovsk.

In banning "Hello, Dolly!", Moscow abruptly confronted Washington with a cultural challenge of the deepest gravity.

The men here who favor lobbing one into the men's room of the Kremlin are already urging a five-year prohibition against the Bolshoi Ballet, and Sol Hurok has been warned that "we're eyeball to eyeball under the complexion bulbs."

The voice of sanity behind the scenes belongs to Dr. Hugo Hans, whose seminal work, "Culture Can Turn the Tide," defines 93 brilliantly thought-out steps up the escalation ladder which precede the dreadful step 94, universal cultural war. (Banning pre-dawn Russian classes on educational TV, permitting unlimited export of movie magazines to the Soviet Union, etc.)

### Up to Step 22

Dr. Hans points out that in refusing to let Fischer go to Cuba to play chess, the United States, unwittingly perhaps, was escalating to step 22. ("Insulting the enemy's national game.") A reasoned response by the Russians would have been a long article in Pravda denouncing baseball as hooliganism.

This, he notes, was impossible

for a number of reasons. For another, the Russians hadn't read his book and, hence, did not know the proper response.

### The Wrong Answer

Instead, they escalated immediately to step 67. ("Harass the enemy's road shows.") Even at this level, Dr. Hans points out, effective cultural warfare can be waged without intense danger of wiping out all culture. To ban further tours by the Bolshoi, for example, would invite further escalation by the Russians. The reasoned response would be to bed the troupe in sheets full of cracker crumbs, house them in hotel rooms next to convention parties, and steer them through a program of rigorously planned activity such as Doris Day movies, visits to the Senate and afternoon TV game shows.

Dr. Hans's critics have vilified him for daring to think about ways of making culture an effective weapon of the state. As the Russians have shown again, however, culture in the era of the superstate is as much an instrument of policy as the I.C.B.M. and the secret agent. As Dr. Hans puts it, "You can't make an omelet without cracking a few eggheads."